Submission

by Michel Houellebecq



About the Book

A daring, captivating tale from France?s most famous living literary figure, SUBMISSION imagines a French presidential election in which a Muslim candidate emerges victorious --- not through a coup but through a peaceful runoff. Narrating this turn of events is a middle-aged literature professor whose passions include sleeping with his students and studying J.-K. Huysmans (the Decadent author who eventually converted to Catholicism). As he watches Islamic law come into force, our sex-obsessed scholar misses seeing women in short skirts, but he is intrigued by polygamy. Ultimately, he must decide whether to convert in order to advance his career.

Brimming with satirical wit and provocative what-ifs, SUBMISSION poses essential questions of our time, examining the changing face of Europe and the role of religious fundamentalism in global politics.

Discussion Guide

1. As you read the epigraph from J.-K. Huysmans?s novel EN ROUTE, what route did you expect SUBMISSION to take? What makes Huysmans an ironic choice for François?s research, despite the many parallels in their lives? What makes a professor of literature an ideal person to narrate this novel?

2. How did your opinion of François shift as he recounted his experience? What traits make him an effective storyteller?

3. In SUBMISSION, is Michel Houellebecq satirizing only the French intelligentsia? Do you notice the same points being raised in American political life?

4. If SUBMISSION had been set in America, would Ben Abbes?s election have produced the same cultural transformations? How would higher education change if Harvard were owned by a Saudi prince?

5. What does sex mean to François before and after the election?

6. When Myriam considers immigrating to Israel despite not knowing Hebrew, what does her situation illustrate about the precarious position of assimilated Jewish citizens in France?s rapidly changing society? What has French culture meant to her, besides good cheese?

7. Is it possible to truly separate religion and politics? Does this question have a different answer in America and in western Europe? Could the French policy of *laïcité* ever be implemented in America?

8. Does Ben Abbes?s economic plan appeal to you? Would you vote for a candidate who supports distributism (?neither capitalism nor communism --- a sort of state capitalism?[in which] the basic economic unit was the family business?)?

9. Over dinner, Alain Tanneur tells François that Ben Abbes?s foreign policy is to ?shift Europe?s center of gravity toward the south,? integrating perhaps Turkey and Morocco, and then Tunisia and Algeria, into the European Union. What do you predict for the real future of Europe?s identity? Do you agree with the Sorbonne?s fictional new president, Robert Rediger, in his belief that Western society is obviously doomed?

10. When François flees to the southwestern countryside in his Touareg, what does he discover about the limitations of his survival abilities?

11. How would the novel be different if it had been told from a female professor?s perspective?

12. In each of the book?s story lines, what remains consistent across time, regardless of place? Discuss François?s ultimate decision. Would you have made the same choice? Is conversion always synonymous with submission?

13. Is the novel realistic about the democratic process? Is Ben Abbes really a moderate? In reality, will his brand of rhetoric become the status quo in elections around the globe, or will extremism become the key to winning?

14. Did you enjoy Houellebecq?s sense of humor? What techniques does he use to draw out the ironies in Francois?s narration? How does SUBMISSION enrich your understanding of the author?s previous books?

Author Bio

Michel Houellebecq is a French novelist, poet, and literary critic. His novels include the international bestseller THE ELEMENTARY PARTICLES and THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY, which won the 2010 Prix Goncourt. He lives in France.

Critical Praise

?Houellebecq is not merely a satirist but --- more unusually --- a *sincere* satirist, genuinely saddened by the absurdities of history and the madnesses of mankind.?

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Publication Date: October 20, 2015
Genres: Current Affairs, Fiction, Literary Fiction, Politics
Hardcover: 256 pages
Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
ISBN-10: 0374271577
ISBN-13: 9780374271572